

Language, Culture and Social Connectedness

Edited by

Ann Dashwood and Jeong-Bae Son

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P U B L I S H I N G

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PREFACE

Diverse interest in language, pedagogy, identity and community has found expression through online interaction, networking and connectedness in the discourses captured in this book, *Language, Culture and Social Connectedness*. Issues surrounding language use in spoken, written and multimedia forms and in sociocultural responses, indigenous knowledges and ethnic perspectives are expanding in the 2010's, with consequential transnational implications for pedagogy in higher education. Language education is no longer oriented towards grammar, memorization and learning by rote, but rather using language and cultural knowledge as a means to communicate and connect to others around the globe. Geographical and physical boundaries are being transcended by technology as students learn to reach out to the world around them.

Embedded so closely in the way we live, and see the world, knowing how language works and understanding its influence on who we are as human beings with intelligence, with needs and wants, to share joys and jokes to play and be serious, all parts of our culture are wedded to the language and how we speak, read, write and listen. In particular, language learning can provide opportunities for learners to explore the ways in which language and culture interrelate and the consequences of this interrelationship for communicating with others. One of the roles which effective language learners need to develop is the ability to be intercultural mediators – people who can interpret the values, attitudes and practices of people from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds for themselves and for others.

Language is one of the most important forms of social capital in the modern world, and improving language skills is an urgent issue of social justice and one of the most effective forms of equalising opportunities. Migrants from non English-speaking backgrounds who come to Australia, for example the Sudanese refugee population of Toowoomba, are in urgent need of skilled, committed and pedagogically-sound help with their English. Without such help, a whole generation of Australian society will be denied opportunities, not just opportunities for individual betterment but opportunities for making the most of their citizenship and contribution to our nation.

This book explores some of the intricate relationships between language, culture and social connectedness in our diverse local and transnational communities. In a period of challenge in our history, there are tensions that connect and others that tend to disconnect endeavours across the social landscape. Connectedness includes relationships both formal and informal and the benefits those relationships bring to the individual as well as to society. Social connectedness describes the level of engagement and trust an individual has with others in their community and the roles they take on, their friendships and participation in different activities. People who feel socially connected also contribute towards building communities and society. They help to create "social capital" as networks that promote effective social functions.

The book presents nine chapters peer reviewed by independent experts in the fields of education, educational technology and applied linguistics. Chapter 1 illustrates how best practice principles of scholarship and engagement are cornerstones of transnational pedagogy which academics develop by means of creative partnerships with their students through interactive exchanges of knowledge. It argues that both principles strengthen the effectiveness of curriculum design and learning outcomes in university. Chapter 2 addresses the issue of the belated realisation by educators that many Indigenous Australian students speak very little standard Australian English outside classrooms. It points out that children hear a variety of languages in many different contexts and the language landscape is rapidly changing in indigenous settings, especially in remote communities. Chapter 3 illustrates how a university preparation program is enabling non-English speaking background international students to deal with their problems of academic and sociocultural adjustment to Australian university life. It demonstrates how it would be meaningful for a host institution to look into students' English language learning experiences and provide quality programs which respond to their practical demands.

Chapter 4 proposes an orientation of cultural diversity in English language teaching textbook design. It promotes opportunities for intercultural awareness in textbooks and acknowledgment of the global contexts in which English is now used to ensure a level of intercultural understanding and connectedness. Chapter 5 looks into cross-cultural experiences of Saudi Arabian women in Australia and proposes an authoritative discourse analytical framework as a means of analysing perceived cross-cultural conflict. It points out that the Australian cultural response to women wearing a head scarf contradicts the Arabic expectation with individual sensitivities not readily reconciled in the new

culture. Chapter 6 poses the challenges for teachers of connectedness and constructivism. It highlights that the capacity to learn through social connections has changed with modern information and communication technology and learning is being viewed as knowledge constructed by an individual from personal and shared experience.

Chapter 7 explores how virtual university teaching and learning contexts via the Internet of a regional university's education faculty enabled students and teachers to traverse the geographical borders of Australia and Malaysia. It demonstrates that critical reflection and explicit understanding of the co-creation of the cross-cultural teaching and learning space are key elements in establishing and maintaining social connectedness among staff in a transnational partnership. Chapter 8 uses the notion of "in-betweenness" to interpret the experience of two refugee men coming to terms with the past, through their narratives, adjusting to a new culture, learning a new language and making sense of their lives in their new country. It highlights the role of literacy practices that take place outside educational settings as informing teaching in formal settings as they progress towards oral and literate proficiency in English. Finally, Chapter 9 chronicles the lives of a group of young Sudanese men and women from childhood village life, the carnage of civil war, thousand-mile treks into Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda seeking refuge in displaced persons camps. It tells of the intersection of Western literary culture, storytelling conventions and book production processes.

Overall, this refereed volume provides a unique opportunity to gain insights into the interrelationship among language, culture and social connectedness in our diverse landscape. To this end, we would like to thank the authors of the chapters for their collaboration and cooperation. We are also grateful for the reviewers of the manuscripts submitted to us: Peter Albion, Jon Austin, Michael Berthold, David Bull, Emma Caukill, Pauline Collins, Gina Curró, Tim Dalby, Andrew Hickey, Olga Kozar, Jill Lawrence, Marian Lewis, Peter McIlveen, Robin McTaggart, Warren Midgley, Karen Noble, Sang-Soon Park, Robyn Pigozzo, Wendy Richards, Clare Robinson, Kerry Taylor-Leech and John Williams-Mozley. In addition, we thank Adam McAuley-Jones for his editorial assistance.

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